United Nations S/2004/244

# Security Council

Distr.: General
25 March 2004

Original: English

## Letter dated 22 March 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the statement on the presidential elections in the Russian Federation, issued on 17 March 2004 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Richard **Ryan**
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

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## Annex to the letter dated 22 March 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English and French]

## Statement on the presidential elections in the Russian Federation issued on 17 March 2004 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union

The European Union congratulates President Putin on winning a second term as President of the Russian Federation. The European Union welcomes the well organized and orderly presidential elections in Russia on 14 March. This result, based on a high turnout of 61 per cent, gives President Putin a strong mandate for his second term.

The European Union welcomes the positive findings of the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) in its preliminary report of 15 March 2004. The report notes that there was a "genuine wish to enfranchise as many people as possible" and that the election was well administered. The report goes on to note that the legal framework established by the Russian authorities "promoted openness and transparency both in the conduct and organization of the election".

However, the European Union is concerned by the finding that "the State-controlled media displayed clear bias in favour of the incumbent" and that the authorities failed to attempt to rectify this situation during the campaign. Open debate in the media, in which all points of view can be heard, is an essential feature of pluralist democracy. The European Union calls on Russia to take steps to ensure that future elections meet more fully Council of Europe and OSCE standards, including free media.

The European Union looks forward to a strengthening of EU-Russia relations based on a sustained commitment to pluralism and democratization and the standards of the Council of Europe and OSCE. The European Union therefore encourages the political authorities in Russia to draw the appropriate conclusions from the shortcomings identified by the IEOM report. In this regard, the European Union welcomes President Putin's commitment to continue to build up and strengthen a multiparty system in the country, to develop civil society, and to make every effort to ensure freedom of the press.

The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.